



The Light in Our Eyes by TheRealSokka

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Summary: El smiled warmly. Smiling came easy around Will, she had found; it was almost like she couldn't help it. Maybe that was because they had "just clicked" as Jim had commented after they'd moved in- she was still trying to figure out what he had meant with that. - 'Reviews much appreciated.'

1. Chapter 1

The Light in Our Eyes

The sun's glow was still hidden behind the trees when the first inhabitant of the Byers' house awoke. For a few seconds Will stared up at the star pattern on the ceiling, contemplating whether to stay in that blissful state halfway between asleep and awake. The scale tipped towards *Why not?* and he snuggled deeper into the pillows and closed his eyes- only to open them a second later with the sudden realization: Today was *the day*. In a sudden rush of excitement, anticipation and nervousness all mingled together he threw off the covers and slipped into his sneakers.

The house was still dark and silent when he sneaked through the hallway, but that was nothing new; Will tended to be the first awake. In the kitchen, his first action was to rip off the latest sheet from the calendar, revealing *Monday, 4th of September, 1985*. The second was to take a deep breath and tell himself there was nothing to worry about. It only partially succeeded. Only then could he bring himself to proceed to step three (technically it was 3.5, because Chester had come running into the kitchen by then and demanded to be cuddled) and he started laying out the table, grabbed a few essentials from the fridge and heated up the frying pan. With Jonathan out of the house, breakfast duty had inevitably fallen to him, since mom was usually not allowed anywhere near the stove if anyone could help it- not that Will would say that out loud.

The bacon was sizzling in the pan when he heard the old floorboards in the hallway creak under soft, barefoot steps. Will felt a smile creep onto his face, as it always did. He had become attuned to her silent way of walking, to the point where his ears would have pricked up had he *not* heard it one morning. He half-turned around to see a yawning El- No, *Jane* he reminded himself for the hundredth time- in pyjamas shuffle into the kitchen. As per usual, her hair was all over the place- again, not something he would ever comment on. Chester ran up to her and she blinked at him sleepily before reaching down to tickle him between the ears. Will smiled hearing his content little

barks and turned his attention back to the breakfast. A few seconds later, he felt El peek over his shoulder. "Smells good." she commented. She propped herself up on the kitchen table and looked at him expectantly.

Will pretended not to notice, but couldn't help his smile from getting broader: "You can wake up the others while you're at it."

"Nah." El replied, a grin breaking through that early-morning sleepiness. "What about dessert?"

"I told you, that comes after breakfast." Will explained once again, even while handing her the first waffle of the day. El sank her teeth into it happily, the mischievous grin on her face replaced by one of utter bliss.

This little exchange had quickly become a ritual between them since she had moved in with the Byers. Hopper was very strict on Eggos and what he called a 'drastically unbalanced diet', but El wasn't shy of looking for loopholes and the chief's being an astonishingly late riser had been an obvious one from the get-go. Thus the early-morning waffle or two had firmly established itself as a constant in the Byers' house. Her accomplice could only smile at her enthusiasm.

"What?" El raised her eyebrows between bites, noticing his grin.

"Nothing. I think it could be rain and apocalypse out there; as long as there's Eggos in the house, you'd be happy."

"You thay that asith's a bad thing."

With a pained *ding*, the toaster delivered two crusty slices of bread and Will quickly snatched them out before the old thing could fall apart. He expected that to happen any day now, ever since the constant strain of making waffles had been added to the thing's heavy burden. El didn't seem particularly troubled by the sacrifice, but then she had never had to go a day without her beloved Eggos in almost a year now. Will could only imagine what would happen should such a day ever come. He really didn't want to be around when it did.

But that was a worry for another time. The bacon and eggs was ready

and the young cook turned off the range, slipping half the pan's contents onto their plates before joining El on the table. She gave a quick "Thank you." and then neither of them spoke any more as they dug into their food; no words needed. It was an interesting effect, Will pondered leisurely; that somehow breakfast tasted better sitting on the table and with no one else around.

In contrast to most of their friends, who were collectively morning grumps, the two of them enjoyed these quiet moments early in the day. They allowed them to simply relax while the world was still sleeping, which was one of their favourite things to do. Will glanced at her while she inconspicuously reached for another waffle: El's eyes were following the soft glow of dawn as it slowly illuminated the world beyond the windows, an absent, happy look on her features that was absolutely infectious. It was something Will loved about El; how she could find joy in such little things as sunrise and waffles. He imagined he was wearing just as absent a look as her, reflecting on how surreal this peace still felt. There had been many an unwelcome change in his life since the last year, but getting to know her better was definitely not one of them.

Well, he did think he knew her a bit now, and as such he noticed when she cast her eyes down on the floor, her silence becoming restless. She started toying with the hem of her shirt, a clear sign that something was troubling her. Will didn't press her; if El wanted to talk, she would. She wasn't the type to keep things bottled up. He watched the sunrays creep over the windowsill and across the floorboards. It once again brought to mind the day that lay ahead of them; this excitingly new day of which he had no idea how it would play out. He'd be lying if he said he hadn't lost sleep over it in the last few days.

"Will?" El broke the silence after a while, nudging his side. "Are you nervous?"

Will huffed: "Of course. Aren't you?"

El shook her head: "Terrified. I know you did everything you could, but I don't feel ready."

"Neither do I." He sat his plate aside and threw an arm around her

shoulder, surprised to find that she was actually shivering. He tried his best to sound reassuring, despite his own misgivings: "Jonathan says it's very different. But we'll all be there; Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Max. It's going to work out."

El looked uncharacteristically vulnerable: "But- won't everyone else see that I don't fit in there? That I'm not normal?"

"Normal?" The notion was so ludicrous that Will just had to laugh. "You're really worried about normal? After all that's happened?"

"I just...I think I'd like normal for a change." she confessed.

"I, well- El, none of us can pass as normal after last year. I mean, look at me. You won't stand out one bit." The doubts still lingered on her face, so he continued: "I'm scared, you know. I know Mike is nervous, too. But we'll watch each other's backs. We always do."

"How do you make everything sound so easy?" Will was glad to see a small smile flicker across her features then, even if it was a hesitant one. He loved the way that El's smile seemed to light up her entire face; a sincere smile that had somehow survived both the lab and the monsters. He didn't know whether he would have been capable of that. El scooted closer and leaned against his shoulder. "Thanks." she whispered.

He gave her a little nudge: "That said, you should probably not make anyone fly, or something like that. No powers. Jim can cover up a lot, but I don't think that's part of it."

"Me? I would never." She gave a little smirk. With one flick of her head the coffee machine (two feet away) hummed to sudden life, forcing Will to make a dash for the nearest mug before the liquid spilled over. He silently cursed whoever had invented telepathy, and quickly made sure she had not secretly set off any other emergencies after he had prevented the flood. He didn't find any. By now he was at least warned that things like this could happen; the first few times El had played such tricks on him, he had been caught out cold. He rolled his eyes at her in an unspoken *Really?*

This was one aspect of having a telepath in the house that he hadn't

yet figured out how to deal with.

El wiped away a tiny droplet of blood from her nose and shrugged nonchalantly. Maybe she would have made a smart reply, but in that moment Will's mother rushed into the kitchen, all messy hair and manic expression, effectively ending the morning quietude. Her eyes fell on the two kids on the kitchen table and she let out an indefinable noise: "Why are you two still in pyjamas?! Your new school starts in less than half-an-hour!" She raked her fingers through her hair: "Oh God I'm so late. And I didn't even make you lunch packages. I can drive you, maybe then..."

"Mom, it's fine." Will interjected, trying for a soothing tone. "We only have to be at the assembly at 8:30. We'll be there on time."

"Oh. Right. Of course." Joyce blushed a little, settling down. "Sorry. It was a long night." Her eyes fell on their empty plates: "Hey, have you made breakfast already?"

Will handed her the pan and his mother quickly snatched up a few strips of bacon, ignoring the sudden attentions of Chester who was scurrying around her feet. "Hmm, you're an angel, sweetheart." she hummed as she ruffled his hair, his attempt to dodge futile. Before El could make a smart comment, she received the same treatment and made a small noise of protest, even though with her messy hair it didn't really make much of a difference.

His mother threw another glance at the clock: "Sorry kids, I gotta dash. Please don't wake up Hopper, alright?" she added, glancing back to the bedroom and only now remembering to lower her voice. She let out a little laugh: "Don't tell him I said this, but I think he could sleep through the apocalypse if it happened to take place before 8:00 am."

El- *Jane*- gave a confirmatory nod. Will found it kind of comical how his mom still called the chief of police 'Hopper' when he and his daughter had for all intents and purposes moved in with them, but he didn't question it. It was by no means the strangest thing about this family, that was for certain.

His mother reached into her mantle pocket. And continued to search,

her hand becoming frantic. Another panicked glance followed: "Keys?"

"Couch?" Will suggested.

Before she could start searching there was a little jangle and everyone looked down to where the keys in question had fallen, presumably from somewhere on the fridge. However they had gotten up there in the first place. Joyce gave a little relieved laugh: "Got 'em!"

Raised eyebrow: *Did you...?*

Innocent shrug: *Possibly.*

"Right, I must be off then." Joyce called, already on her way out. She turned around once more: "No powers!" she said in El's direction, smiling to take any sharpness out of her words. The next reminder was addressed to Will: "If anything happens, you will phone me, alright? Promise?"

Will sighed inwardly, but didn't argue. "Promise, mom."

"Good. I love you. And have a nice day!"

Just like that she was off and the front door fell shut behind her.

There was a second's silence in which El and Will looked at each other, before they both burst into laughter. The sound reverberated through the house, neither of them giving a thought about waking Hopper. "No powers!" El imitated breathlessly and waved her hand. A second pair of keys- Hopper's car's, presumably- slipped out of a mantle pocket, floated past them and took their place out of sight on the fridge.

"That's not okay." Will gasped, doubling up with laughter. "That's so not okay." It only threw the mischievous telepath next to him into another fit of giggles, which quickly spread over to Will. He probably shouldn't find this as funny as he did, but damn if he didn't love this new kind of mischief that had entered their home; he couldn't help it.

The laughter slowly faded, leaving a comfortable silence. Right then,

Will simply enjoyed the moment, his eyes closed. This kind of feeling was something he hadn't even known he'd been missing until he had it. He smiled quietly: The word 'sister' still felt alien on his tongue, but he couldn't describe what it felt like to be around El in any other way. It turned out being abducted by a parallel dimension did have its good sides, if not that many.

"Will you be okay?"

When Will glanced at her, EL's eyes were wide and questioning, just a faint trace of her laughter lingering on those sharp features. The warmth that had enveloped Will slowly died down. He knew what she meant, without her having to spell it out. He absentmindedly rubbed the edges of the scar on his side; the constant reminder that it hadn't been a bad dream. Well, that and the nightmares. But it had been months. He should be able to move on. "I think so. As long as nobody has hung up any Christmas lights yet." he attempted a weak joke.

When she was determined about something, El had a way of speaking that cut straight to the point: "Will. I want to help. Mike told me what these mouth breathers call you. It's disgusting." She took a breath: "If anyone starts picking on you, I can't promise to just sit back."

"Those guys who usually do that, I think they'll be scared enough if they just see you." Will said, though he could feel a queasy feeling rise in his stomach at her words. In truth, he dreaded the comments that 'Zombie Boy' would get to hear in the hallways. And the looks. For some reason, those were almost worse.

Right now, though, it was El who was looking at him with those impossibly gentle, understanding eyes that said she knew exactly what he was thinking. "I could make a little accident happen again." she suggested, totally serious. "People slip all the time; how would they know?"

"That wouldn't make it go away." Will said quietly. "I've been getting those stares all the time. I'll be fine."

El's eyes had caught a spark that wasn't at all of the nice kind: "Well, I'm good at staring, too. Whoever stares at you, I stare back." She

held up a hand when Will started to protest: "We watch each other's backs. Right?"

Will huffed. "Don't throw my words back at me." he complained, but she could see his eyes go from overcast with worry to positively shining, and it told her that he was glad she said them.

El smiled at him warmly. Smiling came easy around Will, she had found; it was almost like she couldn't help it. Maybe that was because they had "just clicked" as Jim had commented after they'd moved in—she was still trying to figure out what he had meant with that. Maybe it was because Will was in a way the only one who *knew*, and because of that she could talk to him normally without her thoughts constantly coming back to it. At times, when she caught him looking at her with a strange, raw intensity, she imagined he was feeling the same.

After all, they knew each other's fears better than anyone. Because friends didn't lie, but neither did nightmares: El had more than once woken bathed in cold sweat, heart racing, to find Will sitting on the edge of her bed holding her trembling hand in the darkness. It was like he had an instinct for when the memories were threatening to overwhelm her, and over time she had come to rely on it. The lab was never far away at night, but with his presence next to her, she could keep it at arm's length.

And this instinct worked both ways: When during the nights she heard Will whimper and trash in his sleep, she would sneak through the hallway, wrapping her arms around him so that the shadows couldn't snatch him away. Listening to his breathing evening out when they finally let him go was soothing and often gifted her dreamless nights, too. But no matter whether they fell asleep together or talked the night away in quiet voices, they always stayed with each other until morning. It was an unspoken understanding between them. A lot of what they said was unspoken.

It had gotten to the point where El felt like they were almost sharing a headspace. They could surprise each other and make each other laugh, but on several occasions El had found herself thinking something, only for Will to voice it half-a-heartbeat later. The wordless glances that passed between them frequently seemed to

drive their friends nuts ("Just *talk*, for Christ's sake; we want to get the joke, too!")

El smiled at the memory. She wondered whether this was how it felt like to have a brother. It was a nice thought; but shouldn't siblings be people you knew almost all your life? That was what the dictionary said, at least. Will had entered her life only recently; and yet somehow it didn't seem to make a difference. She understood that their bond was different than the one she felt with Mike, but it didn't feel any less strong.

A noise from the adjoining room interrupted her musings. A few minutes later a half-alive, half-dressed chief of police entered the room, yawning like a lion. El was used to that sight at this point, but she could tell that Will still had to suppress a giggle whenever he saw it appear around the corner. Jim flopped down on the nearest chair and made a vague gesture that signalled "Coffee!" Will made a reach for the still-warm mug and handed it over, receiving a noise that could have been a "Thank you." or just another yawn.

El glanced at her watch and decided that they should probably be on their way, before Jim was awake enough to hit into the same vein as Mrs. Byers. Right on cue, as soon as she had finished that thought, Will jumped off the table and headed for his room. Stifling a grin, El followed suit. She exchanged her pyjamas for a pair of hand-me-down trousers and a new shirt that Mike had bought her when she was still confined to the cabin; a dark red thing with blue sleeves and a star on the chest. It was too short at the waist and the sleeves were starting to come up small, too, but it was her favourite thing to wear and she felt like it would give her the most confidence today. She even stopped for a few seconds to check her appearance in the mirror, something she almost never did. *Okay. Pretty. Pretty normal.*

When she stepped back into the hallway, Hopper was already waiting for her, now fully awake. He looked her up and down with a strange mix of pride and worry: "Looking good, kiddo. You ready for this?"

No. Maybe. "Yes."

"Good, good." Jim said, just as the door opened behind him. Will joined them, wearing a blue jeans and a smart new blazer,

specifically bought for this day. Jim stepped back and took a long look at them. "You two take good care of each other. I'm counting on you. And don't be nervous; it's everyone's first day. Just remember what we told you. And..."

El couldn't help but smile as Jim continued on. It was a rare thing seeing him this talkative; it looked almost as if he was more nervous than she was over her first day. Finally, he opened his mouth for the final rule: "And..."

"No powers!" the two replied as one.

"Exactly." He gave a gruff smile. "Don't put me on the spot."

Of course they promised to be careful. Will couldn't resist a straight-faced: "Don't worry, *Jane* would never use her powers irresponsibly." which earned him a glare from the girl in question. As soon as they were out the door, El gave him an elbow to the ribs: *Idiot*.

When Will could breathe again, his eyes were laughing: *When do you think he'll notice something's missing?*

El grinned back. They hopped onto their bikes. She glanced down at her watch: 7:58. More than half an hour to bike into town, meet up with Mike and the others- she tried to ignore the little flutter in her chest at that thought- pedal to the new, unfamiliar building and find their way to the assembly. El took a deep breath: It would be fine. It would work out.

"Hey. Have fun, you two." Hopper called after them in a final attempt to be encouraging. "No need to be nervous; it's just High School."

El glanced at Will and found quite a bit of nervousness in the other's eyes. But then there was also excitement, eagerness, trust. They braved the nights together; what could stop them in the daylight?

"We will!"

With one last thumbs-up from Hopper, they pedalled over the Byers' driveway, until they reached the road leading into Hawkins. The pines and firs that side-lined the road seemed to pass by a lot quicker than normal, as if they were rushing them onwards toward their

destination. El grimaced; it wasn't the good kind of rush. For a while, the drive was silent. She had begun thinking again. It was something Will said that gave her pause and made unwelcome thoughts rise from the depths. She bit her lip as she trailed behind her friend, wondering if she should even bring it up. When she looked at it with distance, it was a minor thing- but no, it really wasn't. She sped up a little until their bikes were side by side:

"Will?"

"Yeah?"

"You- I know I'm Jane now, but- please, when we're alone, just say El."

His rhythm faltered for a second: he was surprised. They had never really talked about it before. It simply hadn't come up. "Doesn't Eleven, I don't know..." Will paused, evidently figuring out how to say this. "Doesn't it remind you of- before?"

Her lower lip was bruised at this point. It took her a moment before she had found the first few words and started to speak. It felt like she was explaining it to herself as well as to Will: "I- I don't know who Jane is. Not yet. I thought I knew when- when I went away."

Without consciously planning to, her bike had become slower and slower, until she stopped by the roadside. She had never really talked much about what had happened during those days in Chicago- no one even knew that was where she went. Jim was okay with knowing that she was okay; Mike, impossibly good as he was, was simply overjoyed that she was there- and Will never pressed her to talk about the past, as she never pressed him.

He didn't now, either. He had stopped by her side, patiently waiting for her to continue. His quiet encouragement gave her the confidence to push on: "I thought Jane was who I was meant to be. But it didn't work like that. That person wasn't me, do you understand? I couldn't be what they expected me to be. What *I* expected me to be." That moment was still vivid in her mind; how utterly lost she had felt then. And now this feeling of not belonging reared its head once again. Maybe in reality it was the thought of what awaited her at the

end of the road, that sheer cliff she saw there that made her so afraid, and Will's use of her alien name was just the little bump that had stopped the wheels. Maybe.

"I understand."

It was a gentle, quiet admission. El raised her head and saw that warm, fragile look in his eyes that said *He did*. Of course he did.

And with that one short eye contact, one look into the hazel-green mirrors, she wasn't lost anymore. *Not alone*. El felt a hesitant smile tug at the corners of her mouth as she continued to unravel this mess that was more than her name: "When Mike found me, I was El, and during those days I spent with them, and..." She stopped short of saying *When I kissed him*. Her voice had gotten stronger with every happy memory that flooded her mind, and she nearly melted when it reached this one. "And then when I got to know you, it was the same. I want to be that girl, the one that has these friends. Just El."

Will gave her a little smile. "I like El better anyway." he confessed.

Such a simple statement, and yet it meant the world. Suddenly the overcast sky, the road to her first school, the woods so dangerously close to the lab seemed- okay. Not perfect, certainly not welcoming, but no longer insurmountable.

After a while, Will nudged her: "Come on, we're late. Race you to the parking lot."

What can I say? I love these two together, and I didn't get enough of them last Season.

And yes, I should be updating The New Connection; working on it. I don't want to rush that one.

2. Chapter 2

Ok, so, this is really just a little idea that I had to write out. It's too small to put up by itself, so I just added it here since it fits into the established dynamic.

„This is a bad idea."

"Please?"

"This is a *really* bad idea."

El wasn't in the habit of giving up that easily. Especially when she had set her mind on something: "I just want to try something new. It gets so annoying."

"Why not mom? Or Nancy? Why not anyone? Hell, Lucas is more qualified for this than I am."

El shrugged: "I'm not asking them. I'm asking you." *And the others would ask Jim for permission first. And he would try to talk me out of it.*

"Jim won't like this. I should ask him..."

"You wouldn't." she stated matter-of-factly. He would never sell her out, and they both knew that. "And you still owe me."

By the way Will's shoulders slumped in resignation, she could tell she had won. The boy heaved a sigh beyond his years as he accepted his fate: "Jim will kill me."

"I won't let him."

That settled the debate, and all that was left was the practical side. El pulled out a magazine - for once she had planned ahead and bought one of those - and flipped to a specific page, since she couldn't really describe in words what she wanted. She had watched how the girls at school did it, but most of those she found simply boring. Except for one.

She more felt than saw Will shake his head again: "This is an absolutely terrible idea."

"You said that already."

"Well, it bears repeating. Again, you know I've never done this before, right?"

"Will. Just start."

Another sigh, and then she felt the scissors in her hair. "After this we're even. And don't blame me afterwards." Will repeated, still sounding cross. Then he moved out of her field of view and for the next few minutes he didn't say anything, because he was far too intently focused on his task. El kept perfectly still and watched as curl after curl of her hair floated past her to the floor. Will was being extremely careful and took his time – which was one of the reasons he had been her first choice in the first place. The other was that she wanted to surprise everyone with it, and while Nancy or Joyce might have been a better choice for this, they couldn't keep a secret all that well.

About half of her hair was already piled up on the floor of the Byer's kitchen when the doorbell rang all of a sudden. Behind her, Will froze. El on the other hand only saw a great opportunity to surprise whoever their visitor was. "I'll get it!" she jumped up and ran to the door, hearing Will's amused snort behind her. She yanked it open with a cheerful call of "Hello!"

The visitor clearly had not expected this much enthusiasm, if her startled expression was any indication. For a few seconds Max simply gawked at El, or more specifically her head. Then her face contorted and she went straight from shock to uncontrollable giggles, skipping "mildly curious" entirely.

"Holy shit!" she eventually got out. "What the hell happened to you?!"

"A haircut." El stated matter-of-factly.

"That's a nice way to put it." The redhead reached out to touch a handful of the maimed hair strands. "Who in the world gave you this-

ahem- 'haircut'?"

"It was her idea!" Will's defensive voice came from the house.

"Oh." Max pulled back and inspected El's head once again. It didn't seem to convince her on second viewing either: "Well, it was a bloody terrible idea."

"It wasn't finished yet." El defended both of them, trying to ignore Will's accusing *I told you so*-look.

"Damn right it isn't." Max resolutely stepped into the house. "Hi Will. No offence, but I think a professional should take over from here."

Will looked far too relieved for El's liking: "Be my guest."

A few seconds later, El found herself back on the dresser's chair, this time with a very sceptical redhead in front of her, eying her critically: "Well, let's see how we can save this."

Well, El thought a little grumpy, now she would have to head over to Mike's immediately if she wanted to surprise him. Because now that Max knew, Lucas would soon know as well, which meant Dustin would know, which meant Mike would know eventually. And she so loved to surprise him. He always went big-eyed and flustered and *smiley* whenever she could pull it off.

"Maybe we can braid the side that still has some hair left... Yea, that should work. I'd say the innocent-braid look doesn't suit you, but better than nothing."

El frowned, not sure what to make of that: "Innocent doesn't suit me?"

Max gave a crooked grin: "Yeah; you're more the stern *I could kill you with a look*-type. See? Just like now."

Stern? Do I really look stern?

Jealousy talking.

Max sighed: "You're doing it again."

El turned from Will and back to the redhead: "What?"

"The looks. I'm not telepathic, alright, you can just talk normally."

Should we?

Nah.

"I give up on you two. Just sit still while I try to salvage this wreck, okay?"